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EPA ADMINISTRATOR ANNOUNCES RELIEF PACKAGE FOR CITIES AND TOWNS

Lauren Milone Mical 202-260-4358

U.S. Environmental Protection Administrator Carol M. Browner today, in a speech to the U.S. Conference of Mayors in Washington, D.C., announced major steps that will make it simpler and more cost effective for cities and towns to comply with environmental laws and redevelop inner city industrial sites. Browner announced a package of relief for cities and towns that includes steps that will make it easier to develop contaminated sites in inner city industrial areas.

Browner said, "We have worked hard to find common sense solutions -- solutions that allow the cities to do what they do best, ways to ensure that people who must live with the decisions have every opportunity to participate in making those decisions."

To address the issue that is a major concern of mayors -- abandoned contaminated properties -- Browner announced Phase 2 of the Superfund Administrative Improvements -- the Brownfields Program, which will spur development of these properties. The Brownfields Redevelopment Program is intended to demonstrate ways to return unproductive abandoned urban sites to productive use and to ensure future development is done in a sustainable, environmentally sound manner. "This is a common sense, cost-effective way to redevelop contaminated land and return it to productive community use, create jobs and preserve the green areas outside our cities," Browner said.

Under this phase of the program, EPA will fund 50 Brownfields redevelopment projects for up to \$200,000 each. With this money, cities can promote economic development in ways that work best for them by bringing together the people who live near the contaminated property, businesses that want to get the land cleaned up, community leaders, investors, lenders and developers.

Under the first phase of the Superfund Administrative Improvements, EPA worked to speed up the cleanup process at hazardous waste sites. Last year, EPA completed more Superfund cleanups than in the previous 10 years.

Browner also announced that EPA will take 25,000 sites off its Superfund inventory. "We've done a good job putting sites on the list -- many of you have helped with that. The problem was that once a site was on the list there was no way to get it off. Even after the contamination had been cleaned up -- even if in fact there had never been any contamination -- the mere fact of being on the list was enough to scare investors away. It's like a bad credit rating that never goes away. Now, finally, we're removing from the list those sites that no longer belong there, which will allow us to move forward with redevelopment," Browner said.

EPA also will release during the next six months a package of reforms to limit liability in developing hazardous waste sites. Browner told the mayors, "You know the problem -- lenders who are afraid to lend, prospective purchasers who are afraid to purchase, developers afraid to develop. Our package of reforms will help to clarify who is liable and take those who are not liable out of the Superfund net."

Browner also announced a new common sense, cost-effective and health protective way to deal with the waste ash from municipal incinerators. Browner said that EPA has decided that testing to determine the characteristics of ash should be done when ash leaves the combustion building. This will allow for the combination of fly and bottom ash within the facility before testing. Ash that fails testing will be managed as a hazardous waste. Testing ash at this point will be protective of public health and the environment, while allowing cities to continue to dispose of non-hazardous ash in landfills with appropriate safeguards.

This decision on municipal incinerator ash is consistent with the Supreme Court decision last year requiring municipal ash to be tested to determine if it is a hazardous waste.

Finally, Browner addressed the problem of the biggest remaining source of water pollution -- stormwater pollution, which flows off city streets, industrial plants, household lawns and farms into rivers, lakes and streams.

"I believe we can work within the existing law to find common-sense solutions that will protect cities from legal challenges and meet our shared environmental goals. We have been engaged in a dialogue with many of those concerned. I believe very shortly we will be able to take action to give us the answers we need to help give the American people the clean rivers, the clean lakes, and the healthy drinking water we all want," Browner said.